

A TEST OF LOVE

On the Coming Home of a Soldier

By NATHAN PELHAM

"Grandpa, tell us a story about the war."

"I've told you so many stories about the war that I can't think of any more unless I invent one, and that I couldn't do. But I can tell you one about what happened when I came home from the war. How would you like to hear that?"

"Very much. Go on."

The children ranged themselves around the old man, a boy of seven climbing on one knee, a girl of six on the other. Veteran as he was, there was nothing of "grim viaged war" about him. His white locks made up in length what they lacked in thickness. His eyes beamed kindly on his grandchildren, and an arm encircled the waist of the boy and the girl sitting on his knee. A lass of sixteen stood behind him, one arm resting on his shoulder. Altogether the group made a pretty picture of age and youth.

"The first thing I have to do is telling the story is to make you understand how different we old fellows were when we were fighting the Confederates from what we are today. I was just sixteen when I enlisted. I was under age—that is, they didn't take boys for soldiers unless they were eighteen years old—and I applied at several recruiting stations before they would let me in. I had to do it all secretly, for my mother was dreading that I would be off for the war, and when finally I was accepted she didn't know anything about it. I went home and waited till after supper, when she was sitting by the globe lamp darning my stocking; then I blurted out:

"Mother, I've enlisted."

"It broke her all up for awhile. Then she went to work to get me ready to go for a soldier, fixing up a good deal more of clothes than I could stuff in a knapsack. I stepped out to see a girl who lived across the street. We'll call her Bess."

"Have you forgotten her name, grampy?"

"Not exactly. But since I've started to call her Bess we'll let it go at that. Bess and I were great chums, and I knew she'd be interested in hearing about my going to the war. She praised me very highly for my patriotism, and all that, but I noticed something glimmering in her eye, and that costed me some sleep."

"You mean," said the girl standing behind the chair, "that you knew she loved you?"

"That's about it. But she had a lot of stuff in her and didn't like to show how she felt about my going to the war. She realized what I was doing better than I did. Many a boy who went off full of enthusiasm, as I did, never came back. I can see certain ones now whose bones are there yet. There was Charlie Mason. I saw him as we pushed by him sitting on a tree, shot through the lungs, struggling for breath, the blood pouring—But this won't do for children. I'll get on with my story. As I was saying, Bess understood that the chances were I'd never come back, and when our regiment did return at the end of the war more than half the men who had served in it had been killed or died of wounds or disease."

"Bess was really a jolly girl, and all through that long, dreary war she kept up my spirits by her letters. There wasn't one of them but had something funny in it, and these parts I used to read to the boys to make them laugh and cheer them up too. Persons who make merry under difficulties are treasures, so different from those dismal creatures who make every one about them feel dismal too."

"I said this was to be a story about coming home from the war, and so it is. What I've been telling you is simply to make you understand what follows. I tell you that was a happy day when we boys heard we were ordered home to the town where we had been organized to be mustered out of the service."

"What's mustered out, grampy?" "Disbanding, going from soldiering back to being a citizen. I had several chums in my company with whom I was very thick, and we were talking over getting home and seeing all the folks, and I was the happiest one of the lot, thinking how glad mother would be to get me back again after having escaped all the perils I had been through and—"

"Wouldn't Bess be glad to see you too?"

"Oh, yes! I'm coming to Bess, and there's where the point of my story hangs. We boys were talking about one of our company who was going back with one eye shot out, which spoiled all his good looks, to a girl to whom he was engaged to be married. We wondered if his girl would love him as much with one eye as with two. Then some one suggested that I was mighty lucky to go back to my girl with a whole body, and I said, 'If I had lost both arms and both legs Bess would love me and marry me all the same.'"

"One of the fellows, my particular chum, Billy Welch, said:

"'Archie, wouldn't it be a good scheme to try her?'"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You might go home with an arm shot off."

"How would I do that?"

"The one arm behind your back, concealed by an overcoat cape, letting the empty sleeve swing loose."

"That would be more like you than me, Billy. You're always up to some practical joke," said I.

"But think how jolly it would be after Bess had sympathized with you and stood by you, and all that, to undecore her."

"It would be kind of nice. I've a good mind to try it on."

"You see, it wasn't very long since we had been fighting, and I might have lost an arm and not written home anything about it. I couldn't bear to give them the pain, you know. Well, nothing more was said about the test of Bess' affection for me till we reached the town where the regiment had been organized. We came in a train of cars, and, since we arrived late at night, there were few persons to welcome us. The next morning I secured leave to go and see mother, and after she had hugged me and shed tears over me for awhile I went up to my room, doubled my arm behind my back under my blouse, buttoned the cape of my overcoat under my chin and, with an empty sleeve swinging loose, made a pretty good one armed soldier."

"Bess was at the door to let me in and when she saw my empty sleeve she looked as if she was going to cry. I didn't wait to get inside to put one arm around her and kiss her right before persons passing on the street. Fact is, I couldn't wait. I wished I had both arms free. Those who saw me didn't mind the publicity of the thing. All the soldier boys were coming home and were mighty popular fellows, I tell you. Every one liked to see them happy."

"Oh, Archie!" exclaimed Bess between kisses. "My poor, dear Archie! Why didn't you write me about the loss of your arm?"

"I couldn't," I faltered. "I was too broken up. Besides, I didn't know but when you knew I must be maimed for life you would—"

"Cease to love you, discard you! Oh, Archie, how could you think that?" "I only feared it. I had confidence in your nobility of soul, but I wasn't quite sure—"

"Wasn't quite sure? Why, Archie, if I thought for a moment that you had believed I would be so base as to turn you away after you had fought all this time for your country, while I have not been able to stand my share of the burden, I would feel outraged."

"I began to feel a bit nervous. If this was the way she felt, what would she do when she knew I had put up a job to test her? I had intended to surprise her by bringing forward the missing arm a few minutes after our meeting. Now I dared not do so. We sat down on a sofa side by side. Bess, dreading lest I should hurt the stump, kept at a distance from me on that account. I tried to get her to let me put the other arm around her waist, but she said that not for worlds would she risk hurting that poor wounded member or as much of it as the surgeon had left. The consequence was I was obliged to sit at one end of the sofa, while she sat at the other."

"I couldn't get her to talk about anything except my misfortune. She waited to know in what fight I had lost the arm, just how far up it had been sawed off, how long I had been in the hospital. I tried to head her off, but it was no use. By and by she conquered her repugnance at looking at such a thing sufficiently to suggest that I let her see how much of the arm was left. I wasn't ready to make a confession just then, so I told her that to uncover the wounded end would pain me terribly."

"Of course I should have been ashamed of myself; but, having got into the scrape, how was I to get out of it? I tried to screw up my courage to tell her, but every time I was about to begin that look of mingled reproach, indignation, and contempt that would surely come over her face if I did scared me off. I couldn't do it."

"There was a ring at the doorbell, and who should come in but Billy Welch."

"'Oh, Mr. Welch,' exclaimed Bess, 'isn't it terrible about the loss of Archie's arm? Why didn't you write me about it?'"

"I didn't have the heart to break the news to you."

"To think that when other boys are coming home whole Archie should suffer this loss!"

"It's awful!" exclaimed Billy, turning his back to get a chair, or, rather, to hide an effort to repress a laugh."

"I wish you would tell me," Bess went on to him, "how much of the arm is left. Archie won't let me see it."

"'Won't he? Then I'll make him.' Billy came to me and landed a blow on that part of my lost arm which was near the shoulder. Bess gave a cry."

"You awful man!" she said to Billy. "How could you be so cruel?"

"By this time I could see that both Bess and Billy were trying to keep from exploding with laughter. Well, that ended my imposition. I threw off my cape and put the lost arm into the sleeve of my blouse. As I did so I said to Billy:

"What did you want to give me away for—you who proposed this ridiculous scheme? I'll get even with you if it takes a lifetime!"

"I was mad, but Bess took my shot-off hand and put it in Billy's and said that I must either forgive him for telling of the would not forgive me for my attempt to deceive her."

"So there I was, I stammered an unwilling forgiveness to Billy, and that ended the matter."

"I know who Bess was," said the girl behind the chair. "She was grandma."

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OFFERS PRIZES FOR CIVIC IMPROVEMENT.

New Jersey Town Shows Its Progressive Aggressiveness.

Civic pride in the pretty suburb of Pennington, N. J., has caused the organization of a board of trade, which is composed of seven departments—local improvement, membership, publicity, grievance, house, legislation and law and entertainment committees. The officers of the board of trade are: Elmer D. Wagner, president; Dr. Edgar Hart, vice president; George W. Scarborough, secretary; Henry L. Lanning, treasurer.

The members of the board have announced an offer of \$400 in prizes for the ornamentation of the borough. These cash prizes are to be divided into two classes. One fund of \$300 is to be distributed each year among the residents who make the most meritorious improvements to their homes, walks, grounds, drives and premises generally. This fund of \$300 will be distributed on Sept. 1 of each year as follows: First prize, \$50; second, \$25; third, \$10; fourth, \$5; fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth prizes, \$2 each.

The improvements to be considered in the awards of these prizes will include the following: Painting, repairing, planting of trees and flowers, etc.; grading, laying walks and curbs, making grass swards and the general cleanliness of the property. The prizes will not be awarded with respect to the value of the properties involved, which fact will enable the owner of the most humble house to stand on an equal chance with the person who occupies the most elaborate home in the borough. The other fund of \$100 will be distributed in prizes totaling \$10 every two weeks. This cash will be presented to residents of Pennington who make the most valuable suggestions for the improvement and advancement of the borough. The first prize in each instance will be \$5, the second \$3 and the third \$2.

The creation of this fund furnishes another example of the aggressiveness of the new board of trade in Pennington. Organized last fall, the board started out with the idea of securing 100 members. The residents of the borough took so kindly to the idea that already the board's membership has reached 103, with fresh applications being received every week. When one considers that the population of Pennington, according to the last census, was only 702 the numerical strength of the board of trade is little short of remarkable. The purpose of creating this board of trade was not only to make Pennington prettier and more cleanly, but also to urge better and cheaper railroad and trolley accommodations, the abolition of grade crossings, etc.

MAP TO ADVERTISE CITIES.

St. Paul and Minneapolis Have Novel Plan For Publicity.

A relief map of St. Paul, Minn., to be made on the same scale and at the same time a similar map of Minneapolis is made, will be authorized if the common council adopts the recommendation of the aldermanic street committee favoring it.

The project is that of the St. Paul Association of Commerce, will cost approximately \$600, and when finished the map will be used for publicity purposes in exhibitions at different conventions. Val J. Rothschild represented the association when the project was brought up for consideration. He said it was proposed to make a map showing all the streets, boulevards and parks within the city and also the principal buildings. It carried the mayor's recommendation.

The map is to be made at the next meeting under the supervision of City Engineer Claussen, and the maps of the two cities will show them in their correct relation.

Want Special Election.
Petitions were filed recently with Mayor Downey asking for a special election for the commission form of government for Portage, Wis.

HOUSING REFORM DON'TS.

Don't tolerate cellar dwellings. Don't legislate merely for the present. Don't tolerate the lodger evil. Nip it in the bud. Don't attempt to legislate first and investigate afterward. Don't permit privies to exist in any town. Compel their removal. Don't permit houses unfit for human habitation to be occupied. Don't permit the growth of new slums. Prevention is better than cure. Don't let the poor be denied a liberal supply of water in their homes. Don't build a model tenement until you have secured a model housing law. Don't let your town become a town of tenements. Keep it a town of homes. Don't repeat the talk about the poor not wanting good housing accommodations. Don't permit any new houses to be built that do not have adequate light and ventilation and proper sanitation. Don't imagine there is no necessity for action because conditions in your town are not as bad as they are elsewhere. Don't cease your efforts when you have gained a good law. External vigilance is not only the price of liberty, but of all progress.

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